Expanding opportunity for education beyond high school in the United States

by Edmund J. GLEAZER, Jr. *

"ALL AMERICANS will share with us, we are convinced, the conviction that opportunity for education beyond the high school must be expanded. There has been sustained national discussion regarding this need in recent years, reaching a crescendo during the past several months. This is a natural result of the sharp increase in population and an accompanying rise in the number of young people seeking admission to our colleges. Moreover, Americans have always linked education with elimination of social and economic ills."

Thus did the National Advisory Committee on the Junior College, a panel of prominent educators and businessmen, launch a campaign to bring about greater public awareness and understanding of new educational needs of the country. More specifically, the committee sought to put the burden of the new education on the two-year community junior college. They said that most jobs today and in the future will require training and education beyond the high school. They put "occupational education" in the lexicon of college terminology.

In suggesting that such courses as welding, automobile mechanics and air conditioning training should be taught in college, the committee was going against traditional concepts both popular and scholarly, of what a college education should embrace. It was once fashionable, and still the notion lingers, to think of the "compleat" college education as an experience that could be measured by approximately four years of study, culminating in a baccalaureate degree, and leading to professional or executive positions. Those who went beyond to graduate school were something special, those who did not meet the four-year, bachelor's degree criteria were simply not college educated.

Even two-year colleges in the past have more often than not thought of their primary function as that of providing the first two-years of a four-year college program. It is not difficult to understand why. Junior colleges were conceived around the turn of the century as feeders for four-year institutions.

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Éducateur de carrière, Monsieur Gleazer fut président de Graceland College (Iowa) de 1946 à 1957. Il a aussi rempli diverses missions aux États Unis et à l'étranger dont une au Kenya où, à la demande du ministère de l'Éducation de ce pays, il fit une étude sur les possibilités d'y établir un junior college. *En 1961 il fut membre d'une délégation en U.R.S.S. De 1956 à 1963 il visita plus d'une vingtaine de pays à titre de membre de délégations américaines ou internationales.*

Monsieur Gleazer participe aussi à de nombreuses commissions nationales et gouvernementales touchant diverses sphères de l'éducation.

And the transfer preparation function continues to grow in importance as four-year colleges and universities give more emphasis to the last two years of a four-year college education and to graduate work.

But just as important, or so many experts now believe, is occupational education. Men and women must be prepared for a more sophisticated world of work — and that preparation is not available at the high school level. High school, it is felt, should provide the foundations for further study, whether aimed at preparation for the professions or for semiprofessional and technical work.

"Occupational education," as defined by University of Michigan Professor Norman C. Harris, "refers to any and all education and training aimed at preparation for employment, as distinguished from curriculums in the liberal arts, the fine arts, or the humanities."

In junior college terms, occupational education usually refers to semiprofessional, technical, and skilled-level curriculums for all fields, *e.g.* agriculture, business, industry, health, home economics, public service.

U.S. Labor Department reports indicate that there is a vast array of occupations for which at least two years of college study are necessary. These occupations are often referred to as middle-manpower jobs, the semiprofessional and technical positions which comprise a major category of employment in business, industry, and the professions. Because not enough young people enter technical and semiprofessional education programs, many of these positions are held by men and women educated for professional work. Thus, talent is wasted and at once many young people remain unemployed.

The National Science Foundation reported in 1964 that by 1970 all industry would require more than 1,300,000 technicians. This figure, contrasted with 775,000 employed in 1960, gives some suggestion of the education and training job that lies ahead.

Lest we give too much emphasis to the matter of job training, it should be clearly understood that the matter of occupational education, of providing worthwhile opportunity for education beyond the high school, is directly related to the social and economic welfare of the nation, and to the fulfillment of the individual in society. At a time when the administration and the Congress are showing great concern about poverty and the social ills that go along with it, the importance of creating new programs of education cannot be overemphasized.

Woven into the fabric of social unrest are the problems of school dropout, crime, the frustration of the Negro.

While no one kind of institution or educational program can solve these problems, it is interesting to note that in Appalachia, one major geographic section that has been singled out as poverty-ridden, there has been a paucity of educational opportunity beyond the high school. West Virginia, for example, has no community colleges worthy of the name; Pennsylvania and North Carolina have only recently begun to develop systems of public two-year colleges.

Yet these are among the sections of the country which report heavy school dropout and widespread unemployment. There is little or no motivation for the young person of average intellect and meager financial means to stay in school.

Ralph Besse, president of the Cleveland Electric Illuminating Company and chairman of the National Advisory Committee on the Junior College, has been a leading advocate of the Community junior college as a resource for educating people for the new occupations. He feels that the two-year college is a ready-made instrument for providing necessary programs. In a recent speech, Mr. Besse observed:

"It is my earnest plea that the junior colleges of this nation attempt to provide this post-high school technical training for all who are qualified to absorb it. Where training is the precedent condition to an individual's economic independence, the social cost of restrictive admissions is so great that we cannot afford to exclude anybody on any ground except inability to absorb the course. There are ways of helping the brilliant students to obtain their optimum development without excluding the ordinary people. As Lincoln implied, "God made too many of them for educators to ignore."

Mr. Besse also points up one of the problems that has stood in the way of full development of technical and semiprofessional education at the junior college level :

"The opportunities which are available to those who acquire the kind of skills available in a good technical institute division of a junior college are not

well known to the general public. As a matter of fact, there is some psychological block in the minds of many people against this kind of study and its vocational counterpart at the public school level. In the liberal arts orientation of our 300-year old school system, vocational and technical study, short of a profession, has had neither good standing nor understanding. The price we have paid for this combination of pride and ignorance is unbelievably great."

Fortunately, this kind of barrier is being broken. In Mr. Besse's own hometown, home grown Cuyahoga Community College opened in 1963 as the first community college in Ohio (there is a second now, at Lorain). The college started classes in temporary quarters with 3,000 students; in the fall of 1964 enrollments passed 6,000. Miami-Dade Junior College opened in 1960 as Dade County Junior College with 1,300 students. The college in 1964-65 enrolled nearly 14,000 students. The St. Louis Junior College District was created two years ago. In the fall of 1964 the college's enrollment totaled more than 5,000; the college is now developing three campuses for the county and city in order to put junior colleges within commuting range of all citizens.

Possibly a third of the students entering these colleges are taking technical and semiprofessional work that will lead them to well-paying jobs at the end of two years or less. Another third are taking work leading to transfer, and the other third will be comprised largely of adults engaged in retraining or upgrading programs.

Many students entering these colleges simply would not, or could not go beyond high school, if it weren't for the availability of these institutions. While most junior colleges enroll what might be considered a cross-section of Americans in terms of abilities, aspirations and means, there is unquestionably a predominance of young people who come from lower-income families where they may be the first of their families to be exposed to college experience. Many are of average or modest ability, anxious to better themselves, to find self-fulfillment in job and community but who do not aspire to nor qualify for professional advancement.

The community college, as it has come to be known, shows promise for the new education for a variety of reasons. Planners conceive of the community college as a publicly supported institution, serving a specific commuting population, with flexible admissions policies and low tuitions and fees. Their occupational programs generally reflect the kinds of industry and business that may predominate in the community.

There are more than 450 community junior colleges today. They are being established at the rate of about 20 to 25 per year. There are also some 268 private and church-related colleges. The latter generally tend to emphasize liberal arts and general education, and are usually residential institutions. The private colleges are not likely to choose to be a large factor in the provision of occupational education programs. So what the National Advisory Committee on the Junior College and other national groups talk about when they refer to the junior college in terms of job training is the publicly-supported, two-year community college. The press calls them "commuter colleges."

It is the hope of those promoting the expansion of educational opportunity beyond the high school that the commuter colleges will be truly comprehensive in terms of their admissions policies, and their program offerings. The comprehensive college maintains open door admission policies, provides a wide choice in programs, including both occupational and general education, and offers extensive continuing education programs, usually in evening divisions.

In recognition of the fact that many young people will not automatically choose a technical or semiprofessional program, but may instead seek preprofessional work leading to transfer, the colleges maintain strong counseling programs that will provide assistance to the student in making necessary career choices. The work of the junior college has often been described as a distributing function, distributing students into areas for which they are best suited.

Students do not sort themselves neatly into transfer and terminal or occupational categories as they enroll. One of the best features of the open-door community college is that it offers the second chance, the late decision opportunity, and the climate in which the student may be able to find himself.

Many would-be transfer students eventually find their way, with proper guidance assistance, into occupational curriculums, and graduate with the associate degree and enter employment. Some occupational students discover a heretofore unrealized scholarship capability and move into the transfer stream to an eventual baccalaureate degree.

"The community junior college is in a very real sense society's answer to the need for expanded educational opportunity," Professor Harris notes. "Millions of high school graduates of 'middle level' ability need further education and training to fit them for careers within the spectrum of 'middle level manpower' — in semiprofessional and technical jobs. By 1970, one-fourth of the nation's labor force will be employed in semiprofessional and technical jobs which did not even exist in 1930."

The spectrum of middle-level manpower positions is broad and varied. Major fields are in heavy industry, health and medicine, business, agriculture, and the service industries. Within these broad categories, the opportunities range from missile technicians, communications technicians, architectural draftsmen, research technician to dental laboratory technician, nurse, medical office assistant, PBX operator-receptionist, agricultural processing technician, and to firemen, policemen and social workers.

There are obvious problems in developing and maintaining programs to meet the new manpower needs. Often there are no patterns to follow, no blueprints for curriculum development. Henry Ford Community College in Dearborn, Michigan, like many other community colleges, has actually developed its own texts for many courses. Textbook companies are showing increasing interest in the field, however, and will be alleviating the shortage of teaching materials in the future.

The American Association of Junior Colleges, with support from various foundations, has undertaken a number of projects to help give guidance and direction in the field. The Association, for example, published a report by Norman C. Harris on *Technical Education in the Junior College/New Programs for New Jobs,* which offers sample course plans, and suggests ways of administering and teaching the programs. The Association is currently conducting surveys to try to pinpoint prototype programs that can be copied by new institutions. In addition, the Carnegie Corporation of New York is supporting centers for technical education leadership development; one of these is at St. Louis Junior College.

Late in 1965, the W. K. Kellogg Foundation awarded the Association a grant of more than three quarters of a million dollars to strengthen occupational education development services.

Another major problem, of course, is that of obtaining qualified staff to teach in the programs. To date, the community colleges have relied heavily on part-time teachers from business and industry who have the experience and know-how necessary for instructing students in the various skills and vocations. It has been difficult, of course, to find men and women who combine the necessary teaching skills with experience in the field being taught.

Some way will have to be found to recruit and prepare men and women to each occupational, semiprofessional and technical education courses. If community colleges continue to expand in these areas, there will be needs for thousands of new teachers and administrators for the programs. Little attention has been given to this problem — but it must be solved.

Considerable hope can be found in the administration's current interest in education. President Johnson said repeatedly that Americans should be given opportunity for all the education they can take and use. Most of the Johnson programs of social reform include provisions for education.

Moreover, the federal legislation in the education field has had, and will continue to have impact on the development of community junior colleges and vocational-occupational education. Junior colleges are eligible for federal support in the occupational field under the Vocational Education Act of 1963, the Nurses Training Act, and the amendments to the National Defense Education Act. In addition, the Higher Education Facilities Act of 1963 provides support for junior college construction, as do more recent enactments.

By far the most important obstacle to rapid development of necessary community college programs in the occupational field is that of public indifference and apathy, the problem that the National Advisory Committee on the Junior College is trying to eliminate. For when this gap is bridged, the other problems will undoubtedly be solved quickly. The National Advisory Committee recommends that:

"It should be clearly understood by those responsible for education at all levels that middle-level job education is a legitimate function of higher education, and that the junior college is an appropriate instrument for this purpose.

"Every state and local community should review and study educational patterns in terms of population growth, manpower development, and human needs

and aspirations. Junior colleges should be established where necessary; other educational resources should be strengthened and expanded.

"Where needs for the establishment of junior colleges are ascertained, the colleges should be planned and organized to include in their curriculums programs of occupational education. Furthermore, the colleges should be planned in terms of accessibility to students, flexible admissions policies, appropriate counseling programs, and low cost.

"Federal authorities, as well as state agencies, should consider the potentiality of the junior college in attacking the roots of poverty, and unemployment. The government should investigate ways in which the junior college can take part in large-scale retraining and vocational programs.

"Business, industry, and labor should take steps to project manpower needs so that appropriate programs can be planned in advance. College-level programs should be taken into plants and business offices to upgrade and retrain employees. The junior college represents a means of providing high quality in-plant training that has as yet been untapped.

"Adequate financial support must be made available from local, state, and federal sources for the equipping of programs for semiprofessional and technical education in junior colleges.

"Universities and four-year colleges should plan with junior colleges for the preparation of men and women to teach the new technologies, and for research into problems that may face junior colleges in the future . . .

"Junior colleges must accept the challenge to establish technical and semiprofessional programs and to expand them commensurate with manpower requirements. Leadership must come from the institutions which have the greatest role to play in this national endeavor . . ."

Finally, the committee draws this conclusion:

"If we want our citizens to have and accept the responsibilities and privileges of a free society, we must provide them with appropriate education and training. This is an obligation not only of educational organizations but of all American institutions" •